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CHARLES MEDD

LABOR CONCERNS -- JOBS AND POLITICS

ANNCR:

AFL-CIO LEADERS HAVE COMPLETED THEIR ANNUAL MID-WINTER MEETINGS IN MIAMI WHERE THE DISCUSSION CENTERED ON THE ISSUES OF JOBS AND POLITICS. CHARLES MEDD SURVEYS LABOR'S THINKING AS THE 1976 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN BEGINS.

VOICE:

FOR AMERICAN LABOR, JOBS ARE AND ALWAYS HAVE BEEN A PERENNIAL CONCERN, AND IN 1976 THAT SUBJECT IS AT THE VERY TOP OF LABOR'S AGENDA. ALTHOUGH THE NATION'S UNEMPLOYMENT RATE HAS BEEN DROPPING IN RECENT MONTHS, THE UNIONS SAY THERE ARE STILL TOO MANY AMERICANS OUT OF WORK AND THAT TOO MANY JOBS REMAIN INSECURE. AND WITH ELECTIONS COMING IN NOVEMBER, ORGANIZED LABOR IS ONCE MORE TALKING ABOUT THE NEED FOR A MORE SYMPATHETIC GOVERNMENT IN WASHINGTON.

AT THEIR MID-WINTER MEETING IN MIAMI, AFL-CIO LEADERS COMPLAINED BITTERLY AT THE FAILURE OF CONGRESS TO OVERRIDE PRESIDENT FORD'S VETO OF A MAJOR JOB-CREATING BILL. DESPITE THAT SETBACK, THE UNIONS ARE RALLYING BEHIND NEW LEGISLATION KNOWN AS THE FULL EMPLOYMENT ACT. THAT BILL -- TO BE INTRODUCED IN CONGRESS WITHIN THE NEXT MONTH OR SO -- WOULD GUARANTEE JOBS FOR EVERY AMERICAN WILLING TO WORK WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING JOBS AS A BASIC RIGHT FOR ALL CITIZENS.

THE UNIONS SAY THAT SUCH LEGISLATION IS AS SOUND ECONOMICALLY AS IT IS MORALLY. THEY ARGUE THAT THE COST OF A GOVERNMENT-SUBSIDIZED JOB PROGRAM WOULD BE OFFSET BY REDUCTIONS IN UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE AND WELFARE. BUT THOSE ARGUMENTS ARE BEING RAISED AT THE VERY TIME THAT PUBLIC OPINION SEEMS TO FAVOR A DECREASE IN BOTH GOVERNMENT SPENDING AND POWER. THUS, CHANCES FOR ENACTMENT OF A FULL EMPLOYMENT BILL IN THE CURRENT CONGRESSIONAL SESSION ARE AT BEST REMOTE.

BUT AMERICAN LABOR IS CONVINCED THAT PUBLIC OPINION IS TO A LARGE DEGREE SHAPED HERE IN WASHINGTON AND THAT THE MAIN INFLUENCE COMES FROM THE WHITE HOUSE. AND WHILE THE UNIONS ARE FAR FROM SURE JUST WHO SHOULD WIELD THAT INFLUENCE AFTER NOVEMBER, THERE IS A CLEAR CONCENSUS AS TO WHO SHOULD NOT. THE UNWANTED LIST INCLUDES PRESIDENT FORD, HIS REPUBLICAN RIVAL, RONALD REAGAN AND DEMOCRAT GEORGE WALLACE.

WITH VARYING DEGREES OF INTENSITY, THE UNION VOTE NORMALLY GOES TO THE DEMOCRATS, THE PARTY OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT WHO AUTHORED SO MUCH LABOR LEGISLATION. BUT IN THE 1972 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, WHEN THE AFL-CIO REFUSED TO ENDORSE EITHER PARTY CANDIDATE, MOST OF LABOR REMAINED ON THE SIDELINES, ITS POLITICAL POWER UNUSED. TO AVOID SELF-DEFEATING NEUTRALITY THIS YEAR, THE UNIONS ARE ALREADY CAMPAIGNING FOR PRO-LABOR DELEGATES TO THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINATING CONVENTION. WITH THE RIGHT CANDIDATE, AMERICAN LABOR FEELS IT CAN RESTORE TO THE WHITE HOUSE AN ADMINISTRATION THAT SHARES BOTH ITS CONCERN FOR JOBS AND ITS PLANS FOR CREATING THEM.

GH/RCS